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Portuguese online dating: exploring gender differences in self-presentations

Portuguese online dating: *explorando las diferencias de género en la presentación personal*

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate gender differences in the construction of self-presentations in online dating profiles. 200 personal ads and 1006 photographs of men and women profiles were collected in Portugal from the dating site Meetic.pt. The data was analyzed following a methodology strategy based on content analysis and grounded theory. The findings revealed that, by means of a selective self-presentation, online daters try to please and attract potential partners. Men emphasize their rational and practical attributes

and their cultural, professional, and economic status, whereas women value their emotional, and affective facets, and their inclination to dream. Women also emphasize their physical attributes more than men. Although it is possible to detect certain clues pointing toward modern gender roles, gender stereotypes persist.

The results of the study corroborate and extend previous findings, providing compelling evidence for gender differences in online dating self-presentations. Furthermore, the research led to an unexpected result: besides the attributes deemed most valuable, online daters also reveal individual characteristics that are not so positive or are even negative. The paper concludes by presenting some limitations and considerations for future research.

KEYWORDS

Online dating, self-presentation, gender differences, Portugal.

RESUMEN

El propósito de este estudio es investigar las diferencias de género en cuanto a la construcción de la presentación personal en los perfiles de páginas de citas *online*. Para ello, se recolectaron 200 anuncios personales y 1006 fotografías de perfiles de hombres y mujeres, encontrados en el portal de citas Meetic.pt. Los datos han sido analizados siguiendo una estrategia metodológica basada en el análisis de contenido y la teoría fundamentada. Los resultados revelan que, a través de una cuidada presentación personal, los usuarios del portal de citas intentan agradar y atraer a potenciales parejas. Los hombres enfatizan sus atributos racionales y prácticos, así como su estatus cultural, profesional y económico; mientras que las mujeres valoran más los aspectos emocionales y afectivos. Además, las mujeres también enfatizan más sus atributos físicos que los hombres. Aunque también es posible detectar ciertos indicios que apuntan hacia la adopción de roles de género modernos, los estereotipos de género persisten.

Los resultados del estudio corroboran y amplían conclusiones anteriores, aportando evidencias suficientes para la identificación de diferencias de género en la forma de presentación personal en las páginas de citas online. Más allá de ello, la investigación nos ha llevado a un inesperado descubrimiento: además de los atributos que se consideran más valiosos, los usuarios de estas páginas también revelan características individuales que no son positivas o que son incluso negativas. El artículo concluye identificando ciertas limitaciones y reflexiones para futuras investigaciones.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Citas *online*, presentación personal, diferencias de género, Portugal.

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Introduction

Technological developments and the ubiquitous Internet are significant cultural phenomena of our time and mark the landscape of post-modernity. As Anandarajan *et al.* (2010: 505) state, “the Internet has radically transformed the way millions of people work and play, as well as all types of industries across the board”. Although the use of the Internet helps to achieve business and organizational objectives, its use for sociability and communication remains high and is likely to increase (Henry-Waring y Barraket, 2008). Internet is a valid means of initiating social relationships of various kinds, including intimate, romantic, and meaningful relationships¹ (Baker, 2005; Dutton *et al.*, 2008). It is clear that its role as a ‘social intermediary’ (Rosenfeld y Thomas, 2012) and a matchmaker is growing in importance.

The study of online dating has been a developing area of research over the past few years. Researchers have been working within different academic disciplines, e.g. communication studies, psychology and sociology, and they have been using different approaches, theories and models. Some have focused their attention on issues like self-presentation strategies to find potential partners and mate preferences (Dawson *et al.*, 2006), online communication and attraction (Antheunis *et al.*, 2007) and deception, authenticity and lies (Hardey, 2004; Zillmann *et al.*, 2011). Others, have been interested in self-disclosure (Attrill, 2012; Gibbs *et al.*, 2011); identity (Yurchisin, *et al.*, 2005); sexuality (Whitty y Fisher, 2008); infidelity (Aviram y Amichai-Hamburger, 2005); and gender differences in online dating (Morgan *et al.*, 2010). Previous studies have mainly dealt with the textual parts of online dating profiles and only recently researchers started to use images and photographs as a data source (Humphreys, 2006; Haferkamp y Krämer, 2011).

Looking for love online

Internet facilitates and promotes new romantic and/or personally fulfilling relationships. People can meet “through web dating sites, through Internet classifieds, through online chat,

¹ By “meaningful relationships” it is meant alliances that progress from an online to an offline environment in order to constitute enduring partnerships with solid foundations. Relationships where daters become progressively more involved, committed, and make future plans for their shared lives.

while playing Internet games, and through social networking websites” (Rosenfeld y Thomas, 2012: 532). Forms of finding romantic partners beyond the traditional ways such as family, neighborhood, school, friends and coworkers, have existed for a long time: the matrimonial advertisements. But the Internet, in particular online dating websites, providing a database of potential partners that one can browse and contact, generally for a fee, brought new scenarios in the search for “Mr. or Ms. Right” (Woll y Young, 1989). In this context, a recent study from *The Pew Research Center* (Madden y Lenhart, 2006), found that 74% of singles say they use Internet for romantic interests and 43% of those reach to a face-to-face date. Moreover, as Rosenfeld and Thomas (2012: 531) notice, “for heterosexual couples who met in 2009, the Internet was the third most likely way of meeting”. Thus, the popularity of online dating sites seems to represent an unexpected and truly magical instrument to open up new venues in the world of date and romance.

Comparing to those newspaper ads and telephone and computer matchmaking services from pre-Internet era, online dating sites have some advantages. First: “online, it is as easy to search across a million records as to search across a hundred” (Rosenfeld y Thomas, 2012: 526). Second: scrutiny can be made according to specific criteria and personal preferences - users have the “opportunity to prescreen prospective dates” (Woll y Young, 1989: 487). This certainly contributes to the proliferation and abundance of online dating sites where users search for others who share with them passions, beliefs, values, or other common denominators such as physical traits, musical preferences, religious tendencies, political views, geographies, styles of life and so on. Third: “it creates the opportunity to meet people one would otherwise never meet” (Brym y Lenton, 2001: 25). Moreover, it offers privacy and confidentiality: “potentially, cyberspace can provide a more private space for individuals’ dating activities, which are likely to be less monitored than more traditional spaces” (Whitty y Carr, 2006: 35). Finally: in online dating, users can not only “accompany text with visual images” (Humphreys, 2006: 39) and control their personal presentation or, as Walther (2007) argues, their “selective-self presentation”, but also make use of additional services: online chat, webcams, telephone chat (voice over Internet Protocol – VOIP) and message boards.

Self-presentation in dating sites

Over the years, personal presentations on the Internet have been changing significantly. In its early days, the Internet was seen as a space where, thanks to anonymity, subjects were able to create and recreate their identities, composing fictional characters and playing roles of people different from one's self. Gender switching practices were common in chat rooms, online games, forums and other virtual spaces (Danet, 1998).

Currently, the Internet evolved in the creation of personalized environments where users build realistic presentations of themselves. The aim is to achieve inter-personal objectives: bond with the family and real friends, establish new friendships, create virtual communities of mutual interests, find love partners or set (future) professional contacts. On the contrary of their predecessors, these self-presentations must be carefully constructed in order to allow personal agendas in the offline environment (Toma y Hancock, 2010). Thus, self-presentation on dating sites follows rational choices about what to write on profiles and what images to show (Walther *et al.*, 2001). Self-presentation strategies are important in relationship initiation and "self-disclosure plays an important role in constructing what kind of relationships individuals have with each another" (Green *et al.*, 2006: 409). For this reason, as it occurs in circumstances others than online dating (Goffman, 1959), daters feel the need to please and attract others, "to present themselves as an acceptable person to others" (Whitty, 2008: 1709) and to stress and bring out the attributes and personal characteristics deemed most valuable.

Occasionally, in order to attract others, daters lie about themselves. Those lies, usually, are not perceived as factual lies. More than having to do with intrinsic personal features, they have to do with external ones (e.g. age, height —normally men lie more about this item than women—, weight —women tend to lie more about this characteristic—, smoking habits, or number of children). Hence, deviations tend "to be ubiquitous but small in magnitude" (Toma *et al.*, 2008: 1023). As Ellison *et al.*, (2006: 431) argue "the notion that people frequently, explicitly, and intentionally 'lie' online is simplistic and inaccurate". Self-presentation can be a complex process mixing different domains of the self: actual self, ideal self and ought self (Higgins, 1987). That is not necessarily bad, since "possible selves" (Markus y Nurius, 1986) may act as an important element of one's self-knowledge. As Turkle (1995: 263) argues, "having literally written our online personae into existence, we are in a position to be more aware of what we project into everyday life. Like the

anthropologist returning home from a foreign culture, the voyager in virtuality can return to a real world better equipped to understand its artifices”.

Gender differences in personal advertisements

Online or offline, it is important to remember that all subjects construct their identity and try to convey some images about themselves: “people have an ongoing interest in how others perceive and evaluate them” (Leary y Kowalski, 1990: 34). Literature concerning personal advertisements, primarily in newspapers and magazines, and more recently also on the Internet, namely in dating sites, indicates that gender stereotypes influence the way men and women describe the ideal partner and also the way they define themselves in order to attract potential partners. Gender does influence self-presentation characteristics, particularly, when the gender of a potential romantic partner one is seeking is also factored in (Morgan *et al.*, 2010). Men’s personal profiles are more likely to offer instrumental traits (education, career, financial status, socio-economic position), and to request expressive qualities in women; whereas women more often offer physical attractiveness, personality characteristics, and expressive features while seeking status in the form of occupation and requesting for instrumental traits in males (Bak, 2010; Davis, 1990; Child *et al.*, 1996, Koestner y Wheeler, 1988; Morgan *et al.*, 2010).

Nonetheless, although a vast majority of the literature underlines the idea that men and women ads complement each other, some recent studies are beginning to challenge this assumption with some puzzling results. Men may also be looking for financially independent, successful and ambitious women (Strassberg y Holty, 2003) and women, on their hand, relative to the opposite sex, are starting to emphasize commitment, communication and the ability to express feelings. Also they appear to be looking in male profiles for “characteristics like warmth and kindness, and attractiveness” (Fiore *et al.*, 2008: 804). In sum, research may be pointing to a “gender-specific decline in mate value” (Skopek *et al.* 2011: 267).

The construction of online dating profiles tries to fit with what is considered socially acceptable in the dominant culture. Therefore, it is plausible to assume that self-presentations men and women construct may generate significant and important materials that contribute to address concerns with the theoretical interpretation of continuity and social and cultural change (innovation and tradition) in what gender roles are concerned.

Online dating in Portugal

Most of the existing literature about online dating comes from Western scholars and, although the amount of knowledge is greater than ever, there are still authors who consider that much has been written about cyber-dating though little research has been done (Rosen *et al.*, 2008). In Portugal, online dating remains a completely neglected area of study in the field of social sciences. Apart from the work of Santos (2005) the review of the literature reveals no research so far that acknowledges how or whether Portuguese use the Internet, and particularly dating sites, as a valid way to meet potential partners. Maybe because only a few years ago the first online dating site emerged, and with it some prejudices about this type of encounter, the fact is that the academic community has not yet awakened to the study of online dating activities. In a recent report about the use of Internet in Portugal (Cardoso *et al.*, 2012), the subject is not even mentioned.

Thus, this article has two objectives. The first is to start to fill the gap in the scientific knowledge about how the Portuguese present themselves on dating sites. Do Portuguese daters also follow strategies in online self-presentations? And what strategies are these? Is there any specificity about these strategies that can open avenues for reflection on the subject? The second objective is to gain an initial insight into the gender dynamics characterizing this process of self-presentation. Accordingly, the main research questions are as follows:

RQ1: Regarding the texts presenting online dater profiles: what are the personal attributes that men and women stress most about themselves?

RQ2: Regarding the photographs uploaded in the online dater profiles: how do men and women portray themselves?

Materials and methods

PARTICIPANTS

The final sample for this study included 200 profiles (100 men and 100 women) and 1006 photographs (485 of men and 521 of women), all collected at the Meetic.pt dating site over a period of two months (June and July, 2011). Meetic was chosen for three reasons: firstly,

it is the top dating site in Europe; secondly, it was the first dating site to appear in Portugal (in 2005); and, thirdly, it is relatively widespread, recording the most registered users.

DATA COLLECTION

For this study, the user's profiles were selected according to 5 criteria: first, there was a photograph and a self-presentation ad; second, they were between 25 and 60 years old; third, they lived in Portugal; fourth, they lived in Lisbon; and finally, they lived within a 30km radius of Lisbon.² For the rest (e.g. education, income, physical appearance, how long participants have been active users on the site), the random effect was maintained. The sample was limited to heterosexuals (women seeking men and men seeking women). The 200 profiles were proportionally selected among these age groups with most registered users, according to the criteria (men: 15 aged 25–29 years; 42 aged 30–39 years; 33 aged 40–49 years; 10 aged 50–60 / women: 13 aged 25–29 years; 34 aged 30–39 years; 41 aged 40–49 years; 12 aged 50–60). Meetic.pt presents 12 profiles per page. Profiles were selected on pages 1, 5, 10 and so on.

The sample - “event sample” or “plot” (Pires, 1997: 38) - is restricted to users who post photographs. Hence, the results only apply directly to users with profile pictures. This type of sample is normally used when researchers choose an empirical anchor point that is, in rule, relatively rare in terms of frequency. Despite being the minority, and therefore possibly considered by some as marginal data, profiles with photographs may, in fact, function as an open door for the study of the complex reality of online self-presentations.

Meetic.pt allows users to post online profiles in order to find romantic partners. The profiles include: 1) a space where users are encouraged to write a self-presentation message; 2) a space to upload images (pictures of the user, landscapes, cities, pets, artistic photographs, etc.); 3) a closed-ended questionnaire about personal data, traits and tastes; habits, education, profession, income, religion, and partner-preference; and a set of other characteristics (to be answered with a drop-down menu); 4) a questionnaire with pre-defined yes/no questions selected by the users, who can choose to post it in their profiles so that visitors may respond (see Fig. 1). The first step in the study was to select and save the

² This criterion was chosen to include the 18 municipalities that constitute the Metropolitan Area of Lisbon. Here, remains the largest population concentration of the country and, according to Meetic, the higher number of users registered.

profiles to individual files in the computer and then analyze the first two items of each: 1) the self-presentation messages and 2) all the uploaded photograph(s) by each user.

Perfil de José Francisco Online

52 anos
Torres Vedras, Portugal (Portugal)
Procura uma mulher de 30 a 45 anos

A sua altura 170 cm
Cabelos castanhos escuro
Silhueta --
Filhos sim, 3
Principal traço bem humorado

Estado civil separado
A sua profissão empresário
Hobbies compras, ...
Desportos Futebol, Ténis
Fuma não (o fumo ...)

Os meus filmes
José Francisco ainda não adicionou nenhum filme preferido, actor ou director.
[Perguntar-lhe de que gosta ele](#)

A minha música
José Francisco ainda não adicionou nenhuma canção, artista ou disco.
[Perguntar-lhe de que gosta ele](#)

Os meus livros
José Francisco ainda não adicionou nenhum livro ou autor.
[Perguntar-lhe de que gosta ele](#)

O seu Questionário

Costuma estar de boa disposição de manhã?
☐ Sim ☐ Não

Ao fim-de-semana gosta de ir a museus?
☐ Sim ☐ Não

Acha que a vida é como um longo e tranquilo rio?
☐ Sim ☐ Não

Uma palavra sobre mim

Integro, rigoroso, amigo, extrovertido.
adoro viajar e disfrutar do melhor k há na vida ,como p'exemplo...bons carros ,bons restaurantes ,bons hotéis, boas companhias.

Mais coisas sobre mim

O que gosto de fazer para me divertir
viagens, caçadas, cinema, festas.
As minhas preferências e assuntos favoritos
a cultura de distintos países, diferenças de religiões, e diferentes modos de vida.
Um livro recente de que gostei
o assassinato de joão paulo primeiro
O que gosto e o que não gosto sobre o meu trabalho
empresário adora comprar e vender ,comerciante nato, adoro o k faço e viajo por todo país.

Mi perfil

Estado civil separado
Nacionalidade Portuguesa
A sua origem étnica --
Fala Espanhol (castelhano), Português
Vive --
A sua altura 170 cm
O seu peso --
O comprimento do seu cabelo --
A cor dos seus olhos castanhos
O seu estilo --
O seu aspecto físico dentro da média
O mais atraente em si --

Fig. 1. Example of an online male profile. The face and the nickname of the user have been blocked for publication.

Data analysis

1) Self-presentation messages were analyzed using a thematic and summative content analysis methodology (Bardin, 2007; Hsieh y Shannon, 2005), and employing techniques of the grounded theory that Larossa (2005: 838) defines as a “valuable set of procedures for thinking about theoretically textual materials”. A semi-inductive approach, qualitative and interpretative, was followed in the search for unexpected data that would contribute substantially to the construction of hypotheses in a dialectical relationship between theoretical reflection and reality (Strauss y Corbin, 1990).

From an analysis of the 200 presentation messages of both males and females, considering regularities as well as the meaning of certain exceptions or counter-examples, "thematic files" or "category files" (Ryan *et al.*, 2003) were created for both sexes. In each of these files (under the titles of, for example, positive self attributes; negative self attributes; ideal self; real self; partner-preference), excerpts of the user's most significant descriptions were labeled and the words most often used counted. Then, in a process of association between these various themes, subthemes and patterns, the work moved on to the interpretation of the data organized which finally led to the discussion of the issues under consideration and the answers to the research questions.

2) Photographs are an essential element in the construction of a profile. However, as Hancock and Toma (2009) refer, they have received little scholarly consideration in the context of self-presentation. For the study of profile photographs Bell's (2001) methodology - content analysis of visual images - was followed: “an empirical (observational) and objective procedure for quantifying recorded ‘audio-visual’ (...) representation using reliable, explicitly defined categories” (p. 13). Bearing in mind the research questions, the first goal was to discover the categories, common themes and subthemes emerging across the male and female profile photos, and also to note the different or unique pictures appearing in the profiles. In the content analysis of visual images “the researcher is usually interested in whether, say, women are depicted more or less frequently than men in relation to some variable or quality” (Bell, 2001: 14). Thus, each profile was coded for the number of photos uploaded, number of photos with face shots, and number of photos showing things other than the user (for instance, animals, places, cities, and objects) and the circumstances in which they appear. The number of photos where users exhibited parts of their body (what parts, in which positions), and the clothing they were wearing (clothing, for example, was

coded on the dimensions of color and kind of clothing – sportswear, formal wear, casual wear, etc.) were also taken into account. A close reading of the images – in-depth scrutiny and treating the visual as problematic (Prosser, 2006) - was the next step.

Results

The results are divided into two parts, as follows: those related to RQ1, and those related to RQ2.

RQ1: There are four main types of profile ads, involving: 1) psychological and/or physical self-presentations; 2) self-presentations and the preferred characteristics in romantic partners; 3) preferred attributes in romantic partners; 4) poems, famous quotes and lyrics. The results shown here only refer to the content analysis carried out on the first two types. Data obtained in previous studies shows that online daters follow rational choices when presenting themselves to potential romantic partners (Whitty, 2008). Although more research should be carried in order to broadly and firmly sustain this claim, in this study, it was possible to confirm that this also seems true for Portuguese online daters.

In accordance with previous findings, the results reveal that online daters seek to present themselves as acceptable people to others: they want to please and attract, and they underline and show up the attributes or characteristics considered most valuable for themselves and/or possibly for others. The messages written in the profile ads can be grouped into two main categories: 1) the users' psychological, relational and behavioral traits, and 2) their life styles and preferred activities. In relation to 1) the words most used by men and women alike are: honest, authentic, truthful, genuine, friendly, kind, intelligent, educated, caring, sociable, outgoing, independent, funny, cheerful, easy-going, with a sense of humor, calm, faithful, simple, optimistic, sensitive, profound, special, altruistic, demanding, determined, successful, and self-confident. In relation to 2), at the top of the list of words (or expressions) used by female and male daters are: traveling, going for a walk, going to the cinema, listening to music, going to concerts, going to the beach, watching the sea, appreciating the sunset, the moon, the stars, the countryside, or nature, being with the family, reading, writing, laughing, having a drink, cooking, being with friends, practicing sports, dancing, shopping, and breaking out of routines.

Furthermore, regarding category 1), men specifically highlight characteristics related to work, education, culture, rationality, and the practical side of life, whereas women give

much more weight to emotional, affective, and romantic attributes. Moreover, in contrast to men, women tend to emphasize their physical attractiveness. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that there are also a few men who mention their passionate, polite, and human facets, while some women mention that they are hard workers, dynamic, strong, persuasive, emancipated, proactive, and combative. With respect to category 2), no major differences were observed. The top expressions used by men were: dating, kissing, and eating sushi, and by women: reading poetry, trying exotic food, and eating chocolate and sweets.

Although online daters seem motivated to construct versions of self that are attractive (Ellison *et al.*, 2012) this study also reveals that users, occasionally, present themselves with words that may be considered less than positive or even negative. Both men and women mentioned being: stubborn, shy, solitary, boring, bad-tempered, cynical, and cruel. The men, in particular, wrote that they were, or could be, vain, melancholy, lazy, irresponsible, and low in self-esteem, diffident, confused, aggressive, rude, and nasty. Women, in turn, were even more prolific in the use of expressions such as jealous, authoritarian, cocky, talkative, nosy, sad, lonely, depressed, disillusioned, not very adventurous, disabled, sarcastic, acerbic, ill-humored, resentful, capricious, and moody. Though this unexpected empirical result seems to contradict the overall trend manifested in the profiles of online daters, and challenge the literature about self-presentations in online dating sites, it should certainly not be ignored. In the discussion section this subject will be further examined.

RQ2: The literature on online dating reveals that posting pictures increases the chances of finding partners. Meetic.pt encourages users to do so. Of those who comply, many explicitly mention the importance of a photograph in the profile (*“Profiles with no photographs are like books without a cover”* [woman, single, 39]; *“Profiles without photos, no thanks: if you go fishing you’ve got to get wet”* [man, separated, 41]). Although the sample in the study was formed of profiles with ads and pictures, it should be noted that, as Fig. 2 illustrates, the number of users (selected according to the criteria previously mentioned), who post ads without photographs far exceeds the number of those who write ads and post photographs. Among those who upload photographs, there are only 6% of women doing it, comparing with 17% of men. However, in the sample used (N=200), the number of photographs uploaded by women (521) surpassed the number uploaded by men (485). Moreover, more women than men uploaded between just 1 and 5 photos (19 men uploaded just one photo, whereas 34 women did so). On the other hand, there are a few more women than men uploading more than 15 photos (the maximum number uploaded by a man was 23, whereas, by a woman, it was 25 – the maximum allowed). This suggests that, although there are more

female profiles without photos, when women decide to post them, they upload more than men.

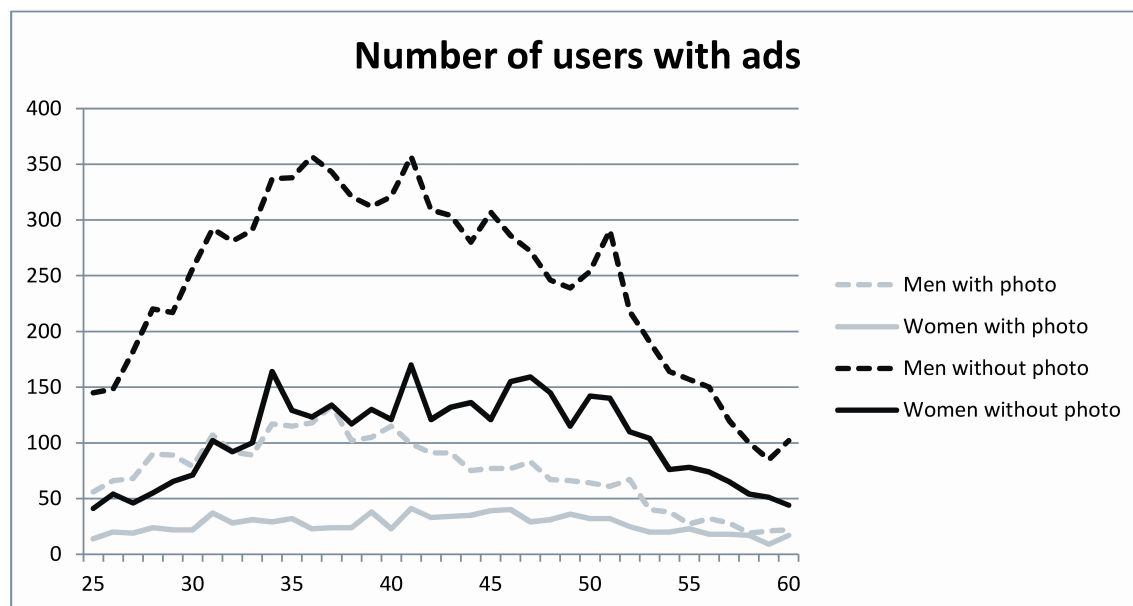


Fig. 2. Number of users posting ads with and without profile photos.

Three categories emerged from the content analysis to the uploaded photographs. They focus on different aspects: 1) the physical—photos relating to the body (body fit, body look, body presentation); 2) the symbolic—images that suggest or represent ideas, qualities, tastes, emotions and states of mind or spirit; and 3) the material—photos showing or pointing to physical objects, money or possessions (the material world). In these distinct categories, it is possible to find similarities and differences in the photos uploaded by the two genders.

Regarding similarities, almost one third of the total sample of photographs is composed of face shots, a number equally distributed over both genders. Regarding the physical category, men and women portray themselves in various poses and behaviors, showing physically fit bodies (or parts of them – strong arms, pectoral muscles, flat bellies) on the beach, in the pool or at home, and in glamour photographs taken at marriages, baptisms or other special/party events. These photos show them from flattering angles wearing fancy, sometimes expensive, clothes, accessories, and make up. Both the men and the women post

symbolic photographs, trying to represent something or express intentions or feeling: sunsets, beautiful landscapes, restaurants, pets, or fine art photography.

The most notable gender differences found in the photographs in the physical category relate to the fact that women not only appear in 96.5% of the photographs (contrasting with the 85% of photographs where men portray themselves) but also reveal far more physical details than men, showing particular parts of their body: lips, legs, tongue and navel piercings, feet, and tattoos —on the shoulder, wrist, nape of the neck, chest, lower back, hip, and ankle. In relation to the symbolic category of photos, it is interesting to note that men, unlike women, post photographs (11) of their workplace— of themselves working as architects at a drawing table, as civil engineers inspecting works, with a helmet on, as aircraft pilots, policemen or firemen, in uniform, or at the office, sitting at the computer, amid papers and files. But one of the more significant and explicit gender differences, if not the most, was found in the material category. In this case, men upload far more photographs (23) than women (5). They post photos of their cars (e.g. convertibles), motorbikes, and boats, and images showing indoor spaces (e.g., presumably, their houses or parts of them —the pool, the fireplace, the library, old furniture, china). Images of capital cities visited, paradisiacal beaches, desert landscapes, and ski resorts —an indirect way of showing a certain economic or financial status— are also much more commonly uploaded by men (28) than women (9). These results show that the users are pursuing strategies in their self-presentations online not only when they write their self-presentation messages, but also when they select the photographs that are going to portray them and potentially attract dating partners.

Discussion

The results show that, overall, daters do not present themselves randomly or carelessly. They use adjectives that qualify them as educated, kind, and interesting. They also post attractive photographs revealing a well-cared for image and prompting the assumption of healthy and appealing lifestyles. There is a notable attempt to please potential partners. These findings extend those of other researches (Toma y Hancock, 2010; Walther *et al.*, 2001) confirming that by a “selective self-presentation” (Walther, 2007), men and women registered in dating sites try to manage impressions and promote the relationships desired.

In addition, female and male users pursue distinct self-presentation strategies to attract others online. The results corroborate those from other researchers: there are important

gender differences in the self-presentation procedure. In the Portuguese case, men underline their rational and practical attributes as well as their cultural, professional and economic status, whereas women value their emotional, and affective facets, and their inclination to dream. Women also emphasize their physical attributes more than men. The findings of the current study are consistent, among others, with those of Jagger (2001: 39) who found that “when selling the self, men market their financial and occupational resources, whereas women offer physical attractiveness and appealing body shape”.

Hence, the study indicates that, on one hand, it is possible to detect certain clues pointing toward modern gender roles (Beck, *et al.*, 2000; Torres, 2000), in which men describe their emotional and relationship skills, revealing their “orientation towards a sense of belonging and intimacy” (Torres, 2011: 16), while women refer to their dynamic and proactive attributes, mentioning, for instances, the importance of the professional work. On the other hand, men and women tend to offer complementary gender-based characteristics. Some gender stereotypes perdure when male daters reinforce the instrumental role, and female daters accentuate the expressive role. Moreover, the positive attributes men and women project fall into social norms around what is considered feminine and masculine and are consistent with the contemporary gender roles in the Portuguese society. Online self-presentations reflect shared cultural values about gender and contribute to the predominance of online stereotypical gender identities. The association of women to the world of reproduction and of men to the world of production has not been completely fractured, and important traits of conventional gender relations still persist today (Aboim, 2010). Or, at least, “traditionalist expectations for the performance of roles in our society” (Torres, 2004: 132) seem to be still present.

Most notably, to the best of my knowledge, this is the first study to show that, besides the attributes deemed most valuable, online daters also reveal individual characteristics that are not so positive or are even negative. Why do they do so? In the absence of literature analyzing why people present negative attributes in online dating profiles, a possible interpretation for this specificity about self-presentations may be the following: online and offline, people adjust their presentations as an attempt to control how others see and evaluate them —as Goffman (1959) suggested, it is a matter of “managing impressions”. By presenting negative attributes about themselves, daters may be conveying the idea that they are not trying to deceive others. This strategy could be interpreted as a process of self-disclosure, as individuals are trying “to present themselves as ‘real’ people” (Whitty y Carr, 2006: 147) and not to gild the pill.

This study presents certain limitations that will hopefully be addressed in subsequent research. Future work should investigate why so many more Portuguese men than women upload pictures in their profiles, while at the same time, when the women do, they post more than the men. Future research should seek a better understanding of how online dating self-presentations reflect social and cultural continuities and changes in gender roles over the recent past. Qualitative interviewing should also be carried to give a voice to online daters, with the aim of gathering more empirical knowledge about online dating practices and the process of finding partners. The influence of demographic variables such as age, educational level, socio-economic status, and marital status, on the construction of online dating profiles, should also be studied in depth. Finally, more attention should be given to photographs and to the role of visual impression management since it is known that profile owners do not self-expose themselves arbitrarily.

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